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ABSTRACT

An invertigation was undertaken in an effort to further understand the role of young, traditional dual-parent families. A total of 249 parents were asked to complete the Iowa Parent Behavior Inventory. Responses were categorized into parent involvement, limit setting, responsivity, reasoned guidance, free expression (mothers only), and intimacy. Responses were further divided according to styles of childrearing; these included authoritarian, authoritative, or permissive patterns of parental behavior. Results indicated that correlations between sex of parent and style of childrearing was highest in those categories representing more nurturant behavior (responsivity, intimacy, and reasoned guidance). Mothers scored higher than fathers in these areas. A very low correlation between sex of parent and parental behavior existed for the category representing more instrumental behaviors (limit setting). Two policy implications that can be extrapolated from the data concern child care and family stress levels. It is argued that child care and more equitable sharing of housework will be prominent issues for the 1980's and 1990's. Changes within the family would require assistance in the form of policies to support fathers' efforts to work at jobs allowing time for house and child care. A third policy implication concerns the development of social programs which would relieve the economic strain that often forces mothers into employment. (AS)

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Parental Role Behaviors in Young, Dual Parent Families: Future Policy Implications

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Parental Role Behaviors in Young, Dual Parent Families: Future Policy Implications

Abstract

Using the Iowa Parent Behavior Inventory, parents (N=249) were asked to report their behaviors within the parental role. Responses were categorized into parent involvement, limit setting, responsivity, reasoned guidance, free expression (mothers only) and intimacy. The responses were further divided according to styles of child rearing, which included authoritarian, authoritative or permissive patterns of parental behavior. Results indicate that correlations between sex of parent and style of child rearing was highest in those categories representing the more nurturant behaviors (responsivity, intimacy and reasoned guidance). Mothers scored higher relative to fathers in these areas. For that category representing more instrumental behaviors (limit setting) there was a very low correlation between sex of parent and parental behavior. Taken together, this sample of mothers and fathers was authoritative in child rearing, and overall, both mothers and fathers appeared to be highly involved with their children, but in different ways.

Introduction

Historically, academic interest in families has focused upon the idividual roles of the mother and the father. These roles were developed in reference both to their structure and their function, and were described in terms of the appropriate behavior for the role. Fathers have been described as authoritarian and instrumental, and mothers as nurturant and expressive.

More recently the prime concern of those studying families has been in reference to the non-traditional family form, and investigative interest has focused upon possible change in roles concurrent with change in structure. Despite these recognized changes in the family structure, the majority of families are traditional in composition thus, the present study was undertaken in order to learn more about the character and nature of <u>contemporary</u> parenthood for the traditional dual parent family.

As is the case with the overall concept of the meaning of the parental role, parenting styles, or patterns of child rearing, reflect cultural mores, social patterns and individual preference. Child development research has most extensively examined this area and has produced the most definitive information regarding both styles or patterns of child rearing as reflected in parental behaviors.

Baumrind (1966) initially described and categorized the parental "manner" or approach as four patterns or styles of parental behavior, labeled as authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and non-conformist. These four patterns eventually become three, and fell on a continuum. At one end of the spectrum is the authoritarian parent and at the other end is the permissive parent. Conceived by Baumrind as "poles apart" in child rearing philosophy and practice, authoritarian and permissive parents are similar in that neither allows the child to effectively orchestrate or facilitate their own socialization. Authoritarian parents are rigid and inflexible, placing high expectations on the child. Permissive parents, on the other hand, exert little, if any, control over the

child's behavior, believing that the child will eventually learn to control himself. The permissive orientation has enjoyed widespread popularity in recent years, fueled by the "self actualization" thinking made popular by Carl Rogers (1960). Basically, this orientation supports the contention that discipline will interfere with the child's "natural" tendencies and thwart the child's creativity, thus possibly preventing the development of the full human potential.

There is a middle ground, which Baumrind (1972) has categorized as authoritative. The authoritative parent attempts to direct the child in a rational, issue-oriented manner, encouraging independence, yet valuing conformity to social and cultural mores. This particular parental style has received wide validation from the research on the effects of parental behaviors on children (Baumrind, 1966; Hoffman, 1970; Baumrind, 1973). Baumrind herself supports this particular parental style as likely the most optimal.

Parental behaviors are strongly influenced by socially defined "ideal types." Duvall (1979) attempted to obtain a more definitive description of a "good" mother and a "good" father. Characteristics for each tended to fall within the commonly accepted definitions of the expressive female and instrumental male (Parsons, 1955). Her results clearly suggest that the mother's role is concerned with the development of the affective nature of the child while the father is more concerned with his relationship to the child as both grow and as the child matures.

Snow (1981) also considered ideal motherhood and fatherhood. Figure 1 outlines parental responses in order of their priority.

Insert Figure 1

Notably, there is considerable androgeny in terms of the definition of "ideal." The basic difference between the criteria of "ideal" for mother and that for father regards the provider role, which is clearly an instrumental trait, and is assigned to fathers.

The Present Study

LeMasters (1970) in his role analysis of modern parenthood, observed that:

1. The role of parent in modern America is not well defined.
2. The role is not adequately delimited.
3. Modern parents are not well prepared for their role as mothers and fathers.
4. There is a romantic complex about parenthood.

5. Standards of role performance imposed upon contemporary parents are too high.

6. There is no traditional model for contemporary parents to follow in rearing their children.

7. Other, new roles have been assumed by modern parents since World War II, that are not always completely compatible with the role of parent.

8. Parenthood is not a role that can be honestly withdrawn from.

9. Children are expected to be reared not only differently from their parents but also better.

It is apparent that what is actually understood about how parents behave in their role is quite limited. This investigation was undertaken in an effort to further understand the role for contemporary, young, traditional dual-parent families. The study hypothesized that fathers would not be as involved with their children as mothers, especially within the more nurturant and expressive domains. Fathers were also expected to be more authoritarian and limit setting toward their children than mothers. The study did not intend to directly compare mothers and fathers because it was felt that the roles are characteristically different.

Sample:

Respondants for this study were limited to dual parent households having a child in the last four years, those parents having less than three children, and those parents born since 1950, thus not a random sample of all parents. The rationale behind this decision is that policy must be sensitive to present time as well as future need. This sample will be in the parental role for some period into the future. County birth records were used to generate the sample, and a percent random technique was employed to identify potential participants within the predefined population universe. Participants are from the upper midwestern section of the United States, having a cross section of both rural and urban residents according to U.S. Census defintions of the terms (U.S. Census, 1980).

Instrumentation:

The Iowa Parent Behavior Inventory (IPBI) was used to gather data on parent behavior. This is a 36 item scaled questionnaire which has been adjusted for behaviors appropriate to the mother role and father role. Reliability and validity have been previously established (Jasper, Crase and Pease, 1978). Data from the instrument are collapsed into the authoritarian, authoritative and permissive catagories for analysis. Illustrative scales for interpretation of the scores are included as an appendix to this paper.

Results

Of those parents contacted for the study 79% provided useable data, yielding a sample size of 249 participants. Table one describes the demographic

characteristics of the sample.

Insert Table 1

Table two illustrates the results of the IPBI for mothers and fathers. The numbers in parentheses represent the highest possible score for that catagory.

Insert Table 2

While it is not possible to statistically compare the scores for mothers and fathers due to the structure of the instrument, it is possible to examine each of the categories with reference to differences between mothers and fathers in general.

Parental Involvement: this category represents the extent to which a parent is involved with the child in an authoritarian manner, giving guidance and direction while being actively involved with the child. This sample does not indicate a high degree of parental involvement, nor are they felt to be uninvolved.

Limit Setting Behavior: This factor describes a parent who is consistent in setting limits and enforcing them. Parents in this sample were more consistent than inconsistent in setting limits and did not tend heavily toward authoritarian behaviors (high scores) in setting limits for their children.

Responsivity: This factor is intended to measure the responsivity of the parent to the needs of the child, and represents an authoritative child rearing pattern. In this sample mothers were shown to be relatively more responsive than were fathers. Scores for the mothers indicate that they are quite responsive to the needs of their children and apparently allow the child some control in the parent-child interaction which would indicate authoritative child rearing behaviors.

Reasoned Guidance: This factor is intended to measure the amount of reasoning parents engage in with their child. Higher scores would indicate more authoritative child rearing patterns. Mothers are shown to be somewhat more inclined toward reasoned guidance than are fathers in this sample.

Intimacy: This factor described expressive tendencies on the part of the parent and supports emotional expression from the child. Proportionally fathers tend toward greater intimacy with their children than do mothers.

The standardized alpha reliability for the Iowa Parent Behavior Inventory for this sample was .91 for males and .81 for females.

It is possible to correlate four of the six Iowa Parent Behavior scores with sex of parent. Table 3 indicates positive correlations for each of the scales using the Cramers statistic as a measure of strength of the relationship between sex and the particular parental behavior.

Insert Table 3

Results indicate that the more nurturant qualities, as represented by responsivity and reasoned guidance are most closely associated with sex of parent. Data indicate that mothers scored highest in these categories.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to ascertain parental behavior among young, dual parent families having three children or less. This was felt to have social policy implications because of the increase in female employment (this sample had 52% female employment), possible increase in father involvement in child rearing, and the continued tendency for families having young children to remain in tact during that phase of the family life cycle.

The correlations between sex of parent and particular styles of parenting are highest for those patterns which represent more nurturant behaviors, as illustrated by responsivity and reasoned guidance. Mothers scored higher than fathers in these areas, indicating more expressivity or nurturant tendencies than fathers. For that category of a more instrumental nature (limit setting) there was a very low correlation between sex of parent and parental behavior. This indicates that parents behave very much alike in this area.

The relatively low correlation between the extent of parental involvement and sex of parent is interesting in that it may be interpreted as equal involvement in child rearing by both parents, and would appear to support those who claim that fathers are becoming increasingly more involved with their children. These results suggest that fathers are highly involved with their children, but, in nurturant and expressive ways, they are not involved to the same extent that are mothers.

Scores for mothers and fathers in the categories of parental involvement and limit setting indicate that this sample of parents is relatively authoritative, and specifically do not tend toward authoritarian behavior in their child rearing. In addition, these parents appear consistent in setting limits for their children. This would seem to support the finding that parents are somewhat more involved than uninvolved with their children. The ability to be consistent reflects some parental attention to their child rearing behaviors, thus implying active involvement.

In terms of responsivity, mothers tended to be more responsive than fathers, reflecting an authoritative parental style. Mean scores for fathers were somewhat lower in this category, indicating a tendency toward a more authoritarian style, in keeping with the instrumental quality of final decision making.

Related to responsivity is the tendency toward reasoned guidance. Not surprisingly, mothers scored higher than fathers, which is consistent with the ability to be responsive, and reflects authoritative patterns of parental behavior. Fathers tended toward less reasoning, which points toward a more authoritarian style, and is consistent with the expectations of the male instrumental role.

An intersting result, and one which is somewhat difficult to explain based upon the previous findings, is that fathers tended toward more intimacy and allowed greater emotional expression from their children than did mothers. This may be an artifact of the instrument, reflecting the differences between the mother form and the father form. A second possibility is that highly instrumental mothers may be expressive, but not as imtimate with their children. This may be explained further by reflecting upon the female as instrumental, (e.g. limit setting) as well as upon the nature of intimacy as an expressive quality. The two characteristics are somewhat conflictual, and this may be a particular problem for mothers, for whom instrumentality is relatively new. By contrast fathers are more comfortable in their instrumental role, thus possibly able to allow intimacy and remain secure within their role definitions. This can be supported by the thesis that it is the female role that is changing, thus making the role a difficult one for contemporary mothers, and not conducive to intimacy, which may be a difficult quality to express, particularly when there is unresolved role conflict.

Family Policy Implications

In order to discuss the policy implications of these data, it is important to briefly consider the structure and nature of the democratic system presently operational in the United States. The orientation is one approaching a true democracy whereby government is designed and philosophically committed to self governance by and for the people. This implies that the government serves the people; the people do not serve the governing system. Therefore, theoretically, policies are determined by the needs of the populus.

In reality, our democracy is operational on a two party level, and as such has representation from philosophically opposing viewpoints. The party in power has automatic opportunity to change every four years. Policies which are enacted during any particular time most likely reflect the beliefs and orientation of the majority party, and are subject to reevaluation with each change in administration. This system lends an instability to policies which are formulated and enacted. While our democracy, in its ideal, is designed to serve the people, it only does so within the confines of the political party in power. This has significant implications for families because of the sacrosanct ideal which surrounds the American concept of the family, and the unresolved dilemma regarding the extent to which government can or should transgress the invisible family boundary. Any formation of an official family policy would impact upon these boundaries.

Barring some major and unforeseen disruption, small, dual parent families with working mothers are likely to comprise a significant number of all families far into the future. It is unlikely that either the economy or technology will sufficiently alter this family structure permanently. Thus, two familial concerns become evident: one refers to child care and the other is role strain. Even those children growing up in a stable, dual parent family are going to

experience less care from mothers. Since these data indicate that fathers are equally involved with mothers in the parenting of their children, the question of child care is no longer a female or maternal issue. Institutional care is the obvious solution to the child care dilemma, particularly since extended family is no longer available to fill the void. Government at all levels will be pressured to respond to this need. This is highly problematic. Earlier studies (Dail, 1981, 1982) suggest that the United States government is quite reluctant to develop operational policies in response to this family child care need. This reticent stance reflects a philosophical dilemma regarding the extent to which government should "interfere" in family life by providing support for a role heretofore regarded as solely the family responsibility. These data define a clear policy directive within the domain of the parent child relationship as well as the performance of the parental role.

The issue of the male assuming greater child rearing responsibility is a social one. There is a sub set of underlying assumptions about the "proper" male role which is in conflict with nurturance and caring, and which may place fathers in somewhat awkward, socially suspect positions. The findings regarding intimacy level, for example, suggest a more nurturant father than might be expected, yet fathers apparantly are not acting directly upon this aspect of fatherhood since those behaviors have fallen within the maternal domain.

A second policy implication of these data concerns the family stress levels. It is not possible to fully discuss this issue in this space, but the role strain being experienced by the parents in this sample is likely to be significant, and of itself has implications for structural changes in the family. Eventually it may be impossible to be married, have children and to work both inside and outside of the family. There is little doubt that both child care and more equitable sharing of housework will be prominent issues for the 1980's and 1990's. However, this change will be difficult and require assistance in the form of policies which would support fathers' efforts to work at jobs whose structure would allow time for house and child care. This might follow the example of Swedish law which allows fathers work leave when a child is born. However, the critical issue for this type of change is one of societal and cultural norms and values more than policy.

It also bears mentioning that many mental health diseases are presently thought to be stress related (e.g. alcoholism, drug abuse, spouse abuse, etc.). Policies oriented toward stress reduction for families may, in turn, alleviate some of these societal concerns.

A third policy implication which is worthy of consideration concerns direct development of social programs which would relieve the economic strain present for families and which often force mothers into employment. This might take the form of child allowances provided by the government and designated as monies to assist in meeting the basic costs of rearing a child. This could be money directly allocated to families or given through housing, public utility, food, clothing and educational rate reduction. The present tax structure provides a meager deduction for each dependent child, but that cannot be viewed as money available to families. Additionally it is important to consider the development of experimental programs designed to learn more about how communities may act to assist families and parents in child rearing. This could be parent education as well as community education.

The most obvious question concerns the probability and/or necessity of formulating a national family policy in the United States. This is theoretically viable, but realistically problematic under the present structure of our governing system. Since the government potentially changes every four years, it is almost impossible to develop a secure family policy. However, the real issue is a philosophic one which concerns the propriety of having an official policy for families in America. We have not resolved the government role in family life, or the degree to which the society can rightly accept responsibility for the rearing of the children and supporting the parental effort. Overt legislation, particularly in reference to the family group, approaches a more socialistic orientation which is in fundamental conflict with our democratic ideals, and not likely to be readily acceptable to the more conservative element of the population.

At present we have no laws or policy statements regarding parental responsibilities for rearing children, other than requirements that citizens attend school until a certain age, child protection laws regarding abuse and neglect, child labor laws, and parental responsibility for damages done by a minor child. None of these directly address parental responsibility for providing the best possible environment for the growth and development of the child.

CONCLUSION

These data have given insight into how contemporary parents in America are behaving in parental role. This paper has clearly identified areas of need for family policy action. Others (c.f. Bernard, 1977) have suggested that unless there is some change in family policy and societal support for the family, the family will change itself as an automatic response to its own needs. This proposes a dilemma in regard to the governmental function as a system to support the family structure, or to fail to support it, and in so doing cause it to change itself. Policies oriented toward assisting the family in maintaining itself as the society continue to increase in complexity are controversial and risky, yet possibly necessary. It is difficult to know whether the present form of government in the United States will be able to respond and assist the family in maintaining the traditional, dual parent structure. However, if we as a nation remain committed to the traditional family structure, it is important that those families who assume this form are recognized as having needs, just as do families in non-traditional structures.

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Figure 1

Rural and Urban Parents' Definition of "Ideal" Parent

Rural	Urban
Ideal Mother	**Ideal Mother**
1. is patient and understanding	1. is patient and understanding
2. loves children and shows love	2. loves children and shows love
3. spends time with children	3. spends time with children
4. had good communication with children	4. has good communication with children
5. wants best for children	5. wants best for children
6. disciplines children	6. disciplines children
Ideal Father	**Ideal Father**
1. spends time with children	1. spends time with children
2. is patient and understanding	2. is patient and understanding
3. loves children and shows love	3. loves children and shows love
4. is a good provider	4. has good communication with children
5. disciplines children	5. is a good provider
6. has good communication with children	6. disciplines children

Table 1

Demographic Description of Parent Sample
(n=130 Mothers; 119 Fathers)

$\overline{X}$ Age		27.43	(S.D. 4.00)
$\overline{X}$ Years Married		5.87	(S.D. 2.59)
Children	$\overline{X}$ age	2.21	(S.D. 1.617)
	$\overline{X}$ number	1.48	per family
Total Hollingshead Score	$\overline{X}$	34.86	(S.D. 9.86) (mid range)
Employment outside the home		52% (Female)	100% (Male)

Table 2

Responses to Iowa Parent Behavior Inventory

Scale	Mothers (n=130)		Scale	Fathers (n=119)	
Parent Involvement (20)	X	13.81	Parent Involvement (20)	X	13.69
	S.D.	2.59		S.D.	2.99
Limit Setting (40)	X	31.15	Limit Setting (40)	X	31.09
	S.D.	4.34		S.D.	4.02
Responsivity (35)	X	29.96	Responsivity (35)	X	26.53
	S.D.	3.46		S.D.	4.11
Reasoned Guidance (35)	X	27.87	Reasoned Guidance (50)	X	37.71
	S.D.	3.83		S.D.	6.59
Free Expression (15)	X	8.18	----	--	--
	S.D.	2.23			
Intimacy (35)	X	30.37	Intimacy (15)	X	13.07
	S.D.	2.98		S.D.	1.83

Table 3

Strength of Relationship Between Sex and Child Rearing Behaviors

Scale	Correlation (v)	% of Variance Accounted for by Sex
Parent Involvement	.316	.10
Limit Setting	.264	.07
Responsivity	.49	.24
Reasoned Guidance	.75	.57
Free Expression	not possible to correlate by sex of parent due to structure of instrument	
Intimacy		

MEASURES FOR INTERPRETATION OF IOWA SCORES

Mother Form:

Parental Involvement: This factor describes a parent who is actively involved with the child, plays with the child, helps child with tasks and facilitates child's problem solving. This is felt to represent authoritative child rearing behavior. Higher scores represent high degree of involvement with the child, while lower scores would suggest a tendency toward permissive child rearing patterns, as the scale below illustrates.

Permissive			Authoritarian
4	10	15	20

Limit Setting: This factor describes a parent who is consistent in setting limits and enforcing them. Higher scores are felt to be indicative of tendency toward more authoritarian child rearing behaviors, mid range scores are reflective of authoritative patterns and lower scores represent a more permissive style.

Permissive			Authoritative			Authoritarian	
8	10	15	20	25	30	35	40

Responsiveness: This factor describes a parent who responds promptly to the needs of the child, whether expressed or implied. High scores in this category reflect nurturant parent behaviors and a tendency toward authoritative child rearing behavior.

Permissive					Authoritative	
7	10	15	20	25	30	35

Reasoned Guidance: This category places high value on reasoning in order to help child learn acceptable behavior, and supports emotional expression from child. High scores are interpreted as reflective of authoritative child rearing patterns, lower scores more authoritarian.

Authoritarian					Authoritative	
6	10	15	20	25	30	35

Free Expression: This category describes a parent who allows child to observe/hear conflict, fear, frustration with other adults.

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*These scales are intended as illustrative, not as representing the scales of the instrument.

Intimacy: This factor describes a parent who is physically expressive and encourages positive verbal expression from the child. High scores are felt to represent authoritative parental behavior patterns, and lower scores would indicate a more authoritarian tendency.

Authoritative						Authoritarian
7	10	15	20	25	30	35

Father Form:

Parental Involvement: Parent actively involved with the child, offers suggestions and facilitates child's problem solving and cognitive development. Lower scores are felt to be indicative of more authoritarian parental behavior, while high scores would reflect an authoritative parental attitude, as shown on the scale.

Authoritarian						Authoritative
7	10	15	20	25	30	35

Limit Setting: This factor describes a parent who is consistent in setting limits and enforcing them. Higher scores are felt to be indicative of tendency toward more authoritarian child rearing behaviors, mid range scores are reflective of authoritative patterns and lower scores represent a more permissive style.

Permissive			Authoritative			Authoritarian
8	10	15	20	25	30	35	40

Responsiveness: This factor describes a parent who responds promptly to the needs of the child, whether expressed or implied. High scores in this category reflect nurturant parent behaviors and a tendency toward authoritative child rearing behavior.

Permissive						Authoritative
7	10	15	20	25	30	35

Reasoned Guidance: This category places high value on reasoning in order to help child learn acceptable behavior, and supports emotional expression from child. High scores are interpreted as reflective of authoritative child rearing patterns, lower scores more authoritarian.

Authoritarian								Authoritative
10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50

Intimacy: This factor describes a parent who is physically expressive and encourages positive verbal expression from the child. High scores are felt to represent authoritative parental behavior patterns, and lower scores would indicate a more authoritarian tendency.

Authoritarian			Authoritative
3	5	10	15